



Transformative and Emancipatory Adult Education (TEAE) Network

Research Retreat Symposium 2025
Transforming Work-Life Balances
18-20 June 2025

**Venue: University of Malta (Valetta Campus,
Room 103), Malta**

Book of Abstracts

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Work's Role in Life Planning

Gennaro Balzano

Abstract

Work constitutes a cornerstone in shaping an individual's life project, intertwining with the construction of identity, self-perception, and relationships within both social and professional spheres. In the current socio-economic landscape—marked by job insecurity, pervasive digitalization, and increasing flexibility—the necessity to rethink work not merely as a means of subsistence but as an essential component of personal fulfillment and self-determination becomes particularly evident (Sennett, 1998; Bauman, 2005). From this perspective, work cannot be regarded as a distinct entity separate from life but rather as a continuous process of transformation and identity negotiation (Bateson, 1972; Margiotta, 2011).

The academic and research sectors exemplify the dissolution of boundaries between personal and professional life: intellectual labor and knowledge production are not confined within the spatial and temporal limits of the working day but extend into a continuum that permeates daily life and shapes one's professional self-perception (Koulaouzidis, Eschenbacher, Romano, & Soeiro, 2024). This overlap raises critical questions about the ability to maintain a sustainable work-life balance and highlights the need for a pedagogy of work that fosters both generative and transformative agency (Mezirow, 1991; Illeris, 2003).

Pedagogical reflection, particularly within the field of adult education, underscores how work can be understood both as a space for emancipation and as a mechanism of alienation, depending on the conditions in which it is exercised and the extent to which it aligns with a meaningful existential project (Freire, 1970; Biesta, 2010). Work pedagogy emphasizes the need for lifelong learning that nurtures not only technical and specialized competencies but also reflective and critical skills (Balzano, 2023), enabling individuals to navigate the complexities of the professional world without losing sight of their broader sense of purpose (Alessandrini, 2011; Baldacci, 2022).

Considering these considerations, this contribution explores the role of work in shaping human identity and life trajectories, focusing on the tensions between professional fulfillment and personal needs, the challenges posed by an increasingly demanding and competitive system, and possible strategies for restoring equilibrium. It offers a critical examination of the traditional distinction between work and life, proposing a more fluid and integrated approach that reconceptualizes work not merely as a constraint but as a space for self-determination and personal growth (Sen, 1999; Morin, 2000).

Finally, this paper invites reflection on the conditions necessary to promote an ethics of work that values human dignity, psychological well-being, and a sense of community. It outlines a pedagogical perspective aimed at fostering a sustainable balance between professional and personal dimensions. In this regard, the concept of *learnfare* (Margiotta, 2011) emerges as a valuable model for rethinking work not only as an exercise in skill acquisition but also as a transformative learning process and a source of meaning-making, capable of generating new forms of emancipation and well-being.

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Learning and the dynamics of transforming work-life balances

Athina Charissi

Abstract

This paper explores the potential of autobiographical writing for teachers who engage in reflective practices to examine our professional and personal learning/educational experiences. Based on an inter-school collaborative project of three in-service teachers participating in writing our educational autobiographies, the study highlights how this reflective narrative practice can support identity reconstruction, foster emancipation from systemic constraints and different ways of navigating our work-life balance.

Autobiographical writing serves as both a research method and a transformative process in adult learning, enabling teachers to critically examine their experiences and assumptions (Charissi, 2020, 2022). Drawing from the theoretical frameworks of learning through lived experience (Jarvis, 2009), perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991) and emancipatory education (Freire, 1972), this project positions biographical narrative as a means of recognizing conditions for growth and resilience amidst professional challenges and life struggles (Charissi et al., 2020, 2024; Koulaouzides, 2021). Each teacher's narrative becomes a lens to a deeper understanding and reframing of critical life incidents, allowing them to reflect on the complex ways in which various elements such as institutional pressures, personal values, cultural norms and societal demands interact to shape their professional identities (Watkins & Marsick, 2023).

The project focuses on the implementation of an educational autobiography workshop throughout the school year. It pursues to serve as an inspiration for future initiatives aiming at alternative forms of in-school professional development for teachers, grounded in empowering participants towards the individual and collective exploration of our educational journeys. Additionally, it seeks to promote increased self-awareness and a deeper understanding of others (Dominicé, 1990, 2000; Monteagudo 2014, 2017; Tsiolis, 2010).

The methodology employed in this study combines narrative inquiry with empirical data as derived from groupwork during the twice-a-month workshop meetings. Participant observation notes, discussion, and focus group data are utilized to effectively capture our evolving reflections and explore the implications of autobiographical writing. Findings highlight how personal narratives can facilitate moments of insight, inclusion of perspectives and a cohesive sense of purpose, contributing to the broader goals of transformative learning (Hoggan-Kloubert, 2024).

The project along with its collaborative dimension shows enhanced critical and transformative dynamics. The participants engaged in a supportive community, where sharing our autobiographies fostered a sense of connection and mutual learning. This process enables those involved towards advanced levels of learning and interpretative shifts (Alhadeff-Jones, 2021). These shifts include rethinking identity and relationships with students, revising pedagogical approaches, redefining success in teaching. It also reveals the potential to support humanized, dialogical spaces in secondary-education professional settings. Participants report that the shared narrative process reduces feelings of isolation, strengthens their resilience, and motivates them to adopt more sustainable work-life balance departing from informed actions and an enhanced appreciation of holistic well-being.

By situating the teachers' experiences at the focus of their learning and growth, this study invites further exploration into how narrative practices can serve as tools for reflection,

empowerment, and sustainable change in the lives of teachers, to support identity work, reduce burnout, and promote transformative learning. These practices not only enhance individual growth but also contribute to building more balanced, inclusive and supportive educational systems.

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Between Heroism and Humanity: Navigating Personal and Professional Transformation in Emergency Services

Saskia Eschenbacher

Abstract

This study examines how paramedics and firefighters navigate the intense intersection of work and life, where the boundaries between professional and personal identity become particularly blurred in life-or-death situations. Based on reflective writings from 57 emergency service professionals, analyzed through qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2022), the study reveals both transformative growth and concerning costs of this profound work-life entanglement.

The data shows that emergency service work fundamentally transforms individuals' identities and worldviews. Reflecting on their learning processes, many participants reported positive outcomes - becoming more resilient, confident, and appreciative of life's precious moments. Their work experiences led to deeper personal growth and a heightened awareness of life's fragility, often strengthening their intimate relationships through increased appreciation of time with loved ones.

However, the study also reveals a darker side of this transformation. Most participants described a gradual loss of empathy and emotional numbness that bleeds from their professional lives into their personal spheres. While emotional detachment serves as a professional coping mechanism, it often unintentionally infiltrates their personal relationships and overall emotional capacity.

The research challenges the notion that work-life balance can be cleanly separated in professions dealing with life-and-death situations. The transformative nature of the work fundamentally changes who these professionals are, both at work and at home. Their experiences can't simply be "left at the office" - they become integrated into their core identity and worldview. More so, if they cannot integrate traumatic or transformative experiences (Paul 2016), they run a higher risk of harming their mental well-being (Eschenbacher, 2024).

The study raises critical questions about sustainability in high-risk professions. While participants found deep meaning and value in their work of saving lives, the emotional toll raises concerns about the negative impact of working in the emergency industry (Behnke et al. 2019; Berger et al. 2012). Many participants expressed a need for better mental health support but faced structural barriers like potential career consequences for seeking help.

The research suggests that rather than trying to achieve what we understand as work-life balance, the focus should be on making the profession itself more sustainable through:

- Better mental health support systems
- Structural changes to remove the stigma around seeking help
- Training on trauma coping strategies
- Recognition that emotional impacts are not personal failings

The paper argues that the goal is not to separate work from life but to help professionals integrate their transformative experiences in healthy ways. This requires both individual learning about how to process trauma and structural changes to support mental well-being.

The study concludes that emergency service work can be either sustainable or unsustainable depending on how well professionals learn to live with the consequences of their transformative experiences. Rather than pursuing an artificial work-life divide, the focus should be on creating conditions that allow them to grow through their experiences while maintaining their emotional well-being across all spheres of life.

This research holds broader implications for understanding work-life navigation in professions where work profoundly shapes identity and transforms the whole person. It suggests that in such cases, the goal may not be balanced through separation, but rather through integration through proper support and understanding.

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Edutopia (Not) Created: Swedish Folkbildning as Ideal and Practice

Gustav Fridolin

Aim and Research Questions

Building on (1) previous research on Swedish folkbildning, (2) an ongoing project on participants in Swedish folk high schools, and (3) practical experience in the field, the proposed paper aims to contribute to the understanding of how an ideal of work-life balance is realized in practice.

Swedish Folkbildning as a Means to Create Work-Life Balance

The Swedish system of mostly non-formal, civil society-driven adult education, i.e. folkbildning, is often regarded as an international model (Rubeson, 2013). It predates Swedish democracy and has roots in the popular movements that once sought to establish democracy and a modern welfare state (Runesdotter, 2010). A key aspect of this movement was the idea of promoting a better work-life balance, particularly for the working class, by fostering a culture where there were time and willingness for adult to continue learning throughout life (Sandler, 1939).

This historical foundation remains influential in folkbildning, reflected in government regulations governing financial support for the sector and in the frequently reiterated notion of folkbildning as “free and voluntary” education for adults (Swedish Government Official Reports, 2024).

Participants in Courses Preparatory for Higher Education

Nearly a quarter of state funding for folkbildning is allocated to folk high school courses designed as preparatory education for higher studies. Research suggests that many participants in these courses have weak ties to the labor market and are enrolled due to government programs aimed at combating unemployment (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2020). This raises questions about the extent to which participation in folkbildning can truly be considered “voluntary”.

An ongoing PhD project explores participants’ own perspectives on their educational paths, their understanding of the concept of “free and voluntary” education, and partly their perceptions of work-life balance. The project’s aim is to gain insights into how and when this form of adult education—intended to empower marginalized groups in the labor market and society—functions or not functions as a transformative and emancipatory learning experience.

Living the Edutopia: Researcher and Practitioner

On a personal note, reflecting on my dual role as a researcher and practitioner, I navigate the challenges of combining PhD studies with my profession as an adult educator. This aligns with the vision put forth by the early founders of folkbildning: I study, I teach, and I learn through teaching. However, the formal constraints of PhD studies can sometimes hinder the full integration between the two. Furthermore, the blurring of boundaries between work and leisure raises new questions about balancing dual commitments. I intend to explore these reflections further in the concluding section of my paper.

Summary and Research Questions

In line with the overall aim, my proposed paper will address the following questions:

- How does the ideal of work-life balance manifest in the Swedish concept of folkbildning?
- How is this ideal realized in folk high school courses preparatory for higher education?

- What challenges related to work-life balance arise for a researcher who simultaneously remains active as an adult educator?

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Promoting Future Work-Life Balance: Performing Arts-Based Training to Combat Burnout in High School Students

Irene Gianceselli & Andrea Bosco

Abstract

The issue of balancing work and private life has increasingly drawn researchers' attention, especially after the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (Papanagnou et al., 2022), which increased burnout rates among students (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Neglect of online learning strategies (Tinella et al., 2022) and students' engagement in part-time jobs (Maba, 2023) promote quiet quitting (Radko, 2024) or withdrawal from studies (Singh et al., 2022). In this context, organisations are encouraged to enhance flexibility and mental health support (Joshi & Khullar, 2024; Konovalova et al., 2023). This has become pertinent amidst growing complexity (Miller, 2015). Marsick and colleagues (2021) recommend new perspectives on the learning-work relationship. Work-based learning (Raelin, 2008) integrates real-world experiences, while learning-based work builds individual and collective competences to address challenges, fostering self-efficacy and transformation at intrapersonal and interpersonal levels (Koulaouzidis et al., 2024). Metacognition can stimulate soft skills (Schraw & Moshman, 1995), which are further promoted by metacognitive awareness (Hetland & Winner, 2001).

Data regarding metacognitive training models through performing arts are scarce. This study focuses on a training tested in high school technical-vocational institutes preparing students for various careers. This design reduces the competitive nature, performance pressure, and burnout in educational systems, while fostering peer relationships (Gao et al., 2024; Bierling et al., 2024; Dogan & Dogan, 2023; Hoferichter et al., 2023). The *Metacognitive Training Through the Glass (MTTG)* approach, based on a transdisciplinary framework, was tested on 237 Higher Education students ($F=102$, $M=134$, $NB=1$; age range: 16-21). Participants were randomly assigned to three groups: two experimental groups receiving metacognitive training—Group A focused on theatre and Group B on cinema—while Group C (control group) viewed filmed theatre without a focus on metacognitive processes or linguistic analysis. Exposure time was consistent across groups (approximately six hours), including three 15-minute breaks.

Data were collected with pre- and post-intervention questionnaires that focused on changes in the observed variables "interpersonal competence", "intrapersonal competence", and "motivation". The predictions were that both theatre group (A) and movie group (B) would develop higher metacognitive awareness, but that theatre group (A) would enable participants to improve both intrapersonal intelligence and motivation more effectively than the others. Results showed that Group A outperformed both Group B and Group C for all the observed variables. The findings align with Watkins and Marsick's proposal (2023), emphasising the importance of transformative competencies for learning and psychological well-being. The *MTTG* model encourages reflection on frames of reference, mindset, and behaviours, fostering self-awareness and conflict resolution. It aligns with the OECD's "transformative competencies" to enhance psychosocial well-being in the lifespan.

It provides cognitive tools for developing a theory of mind (Job, 2025), promoting a healthier work-life balance. The study has limitations: it explored two mediators; future research should focus on one mediator, manipulating only the presence/absence of metacognitive process for all groups. The *MTTG* model can foster "critical thinking" (Pastore et al., 2019), enhance social adaptability, supporting workplace transformation through soft skills as adaptive competencies.

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Life between home and work: embodied explorations of meanings and experiences

Giovanni Gottardo & Jane Ferguson

Experiential session

Abstract

Work-life balance is an urgent and relevant issue, so much so that it represents a considerable challenge even for the European Parliament (EU, 2019). The spread of smart working and teleworking has made this boundary even more permeable and blurred: the doors of our homes have opened wide, letting work activities in (Del Re, 2021), thus leading to a re-signification of roles, time and responsibilities. And if in a dystopian future it will be possible to split consciousness in such a way as to clearly separate work and private life, as in the TV-series *Severance*, today we are called upon to question how we inhabit this boundary, how we interpret it, and how we materialize it.

This proposed experiential session intends to exploit the possibilities offered by embodied listening (Romano et alii, 2024) and performative theatre methodologies (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Fabbri & Romano, 2017) as tools to embrace transformation. Interweaving the artistic dimension of performance with that of embodied listening makes it possible to design a protected and safe space in which a 'mélange' of reason, emotions and imagination is created (Kokkos, 2010; 2021). If, on the one hand, performative methodologies allow for giving voice to the experience inscribed in bodies (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2023; Gottardo & Ferguson, 2024), on the other hand, storytelling and listening offer the possibility of reflecting on one's actions (Anderson-Sathe et alii, 2022), opening the way for transformative learning.

The participants are divided into pairs; one person in the pair is blindfolded, while the other has the task of guiding them safely through space. The person leading will tell the partner, who can listen but not speak, the answer to a question formulated by the facilitator. At the end of the story, the blindfolded person will respond to the companion by taking on an image with his/her body, as if it were a sculpture. After the roles have been reversed, and the activity repeated, each member of the pair can write down the things that impressed him/her most about the story of the companion, the 'statue' created by the partner, the experience, the connections and differences between the answers and the bodies. At the end of a series of questions formulated by the facilitator on the theme of home, work and their boundary, each couple can discuss what emerged. The session will end with a moment of plenary sharing, where each can show with their own bodies their balance between home and work.

The aim of the session is to create a space in which the participants can meet and tell each other through words and bodies. This will open the possibility of comparing and understanding different perspectives of meaning and sifting through different mindsets, allowing for a potential transformation (Mezirow, 1991) of the meaning and values around home and work. An embodied transformation that will be driven by the inseparability of reason, movement and emotion, of mind-heart-body (Schlattner, 2022; Spain, 2024).

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TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING: Processes, limitations, actions

Alexis Kokkos

ABSTRACT

Critical reflection is an integral part of both my professional and personal life. My critical approaches to theoretical perspectives and texts inevitably lead me to reflect on the biographical factors that shape my viewpoint. Through this process, which began in my twenties, I have also developed a similar way of contemplating personal matters: How do I deal with circumstances? Which was my relevant prior conception? What factors contributed to shaping them in the past, and how might they transform over time?

In this presentation, my personal relationship with critical reflection is explored. In the first part, I look back on how I perceived this issue during my studies and my early academic career. I also discuss my encounter with Mezirow's *Transformation Theory* in the 1990s (Mezirow, 1991), which challenged my prior assumptions.

In the second part, I present how I gradually deepened my understanding of Mezirow's theory, as well as the complementary view of Patricia Cranton (2006) regarding the three forms of critical reflection and the significance of this distinction in shaping alternative transformative learning (TL) strategies. I also explain how these perspectives have helped me personally to delve into my thoughts, emotions, and actions.

In the third part, I introduce an additional approach I adopted to understand how other TL scholars, particularly those who advocate for the extra-rational view, conceptualize critical reflection and incorporate it into learning strategies. Their critiques of Mezirow's perception provided me with new insights that broadened my understanding. However, I realized that the persistent critique of Mezirow by a number of TL scholars, along with the continuous emergence of new trends in the field, posed a dual risk, as Cranton & Taylor (2012), Hoggan & Finnegan (2023), and others have demonstrated: On one hand, there is the risk of fragmenting the theoretical field of transformative learning. On the other, there is the danger of forming the assumption that there are multiple TL processes which are incompatible with one another.

In the fourth part, I reflect on my findings when revisiting *Transformation Theory* to assess whether the criticism against it is justified. I concluded that the theory has indeed overlooked some crucial issues. For example, although critical reflection is explicitly mentioned in the third phase of Mezirow's ten-phase transformative process, it is not explicitly referenced in the other phases. Furthermore, contradictions emerge in the way the terms "reflection" and "critical reflection" are used. Finally, the relationship between critical reflection and emotions remains unclear.

I therefore draw several implications. It is valuable to return to the original sources of the TL theoretical field with the aim of exploring, enriching, and clarifying them. Additionally, it is essential to seek common ground between the various TL perspectives, as well as to identify affinities and bridges toward a more integrated theory. Over time, this need for synthesis, inclusion, and a holistic approach has become one of my basic concerns.

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When work is not *working*. Practicing radical vulnerability to open up spaces for transformative listening and collective kinship.

Deborah J. Kramlich & Alessandra Romano,

Experiential session

In the intricate complexity of our professional lives, we navigate a multifaceted landscape characterized by both prosperous periods of growth and perilous challenges. Among these challenges, toxic workplace environments emerge as formidable obstacles, capable of undermining our well-being and eroding our resilience (Kesse, 2024).

This experiential session will offer a facilitation guideline through the Transformative Listening Protocol (Anderson-Sathe, et al., 2021, 2022) to engage participants in story-telling and reframe stories of work toxicity.

The Transformative Listening Protocol (TLP) is a methodological protocol that works as a scaffolding structure to foster practices of transformative listening. The purposes of the TLP are (a) to facilitate people's inner understanding of their listening practices through a deep experience of listening and self-analytical exploration; and (b) to enhance understanding of authentic and holistic listening with a desire for improvement and expansion of their listening capacity (Romano, Kramlich, et al., 2024). These align with Mezirow (1991) who stated that free and authentic adult participation in discourse is one way by which learners have access to effectively make and understand relevant arguments, engage in critical analysis, and reflect on assumptions.

Through the facilitation offered by the adoption of the TLP in dyads and/or in small groups, participants will elaborate on their personal stories of workplace toxicity and/or delegitimizing situations to open up spaces for people to experience radical vulnerability (Wright, & Derreth, 2022), and holistic listening in a brave collective setting.

The definition of "workplace toxicity" here mentioned refers to the negative and harmful conditions of a work environment where people systematically experience feelings of power abuse and individual disrespect. Literature suggests that the impact of workplace toxicity on personal life and career may be significant. It can trigger physical and emotional health problems, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Shaji George, 2023).

The aim of the experiential session is to help people to reframe what they have perceived as a personal individual problem in terms of collective responsibilities and kinship in complex workplaces, where boundaries between work contexts and personal domains are often indistinct (Watkins, & Marsick, 2023). What if we cannot change our workplace, how do we change ourselves and our perspectives so that we can escape the toxicity? How can we promote a paradigm shift to discover new forms of collective resiliency and recreate alternative trajectories of agentic engagement with our workplaces?

The focus is not on changing the workplace, but on empowering individuals to revise and, where possible, transform their epistemological perspectives to respond to the toxicity, to remain healthy and to maintain resilient "integrity" from what is happening at work. Our hypothesis is that this shift in premises can be sustained through transformative listening and authentic engagement in spaces for connection with others, while practicing restorative vulnerability and rediscovering alternative forms of responsible agency.

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Transforming a Single Bloom into a Flourishing Garden: Cultivating Collaboration and Community in the Workplace and Beyond

Deborah J. Kramlich, Dina Soeiro & Ahreum Lim

In November 2024, a newly restored railway station canopy in Serbia, collapsed, resulting in 15 fatalities and igniting mass protests against government corruption and negligence. University students initiated peaceful vigils, which were disrupted by individuals allegedly linked to the ruling party; this prompted professors and academic staff to support the students by organizing strikes and halting university operations. Their nonviolent, leaderless movement has revitalized democratic hope in Serbia, challenging systemic corruption and inspiring broader civic action (Zaharijević, 2025).

This experiential session uses Freire's *Pedagogy of the Question* (Freire & Faundez, 1989) to rethink and reframe ways we in academia can engage in reimagining our workplace—the university—from one of survival as an individual to one of flourishing as a collective.

We will use questions as disorienting dilemmas. This is when an individual “becomes critically conscious of how and why our habits of perception, thought and action have distorted the way we have defined the problem and ourselves in relationship to it,” (Mezirow, 1981, p. 65). These disorienting dilemmas are often the starting point for transformation. This work is risky and uncomfortable but these are also unprecedented times. We cannot be doing business as usual at the academy. Society and our democracy are under attack. We need deep change.

Our discussion will focus on three themes: Synergy; Resistance; Imagination. We will offer an open space for the participants to share from their experience. In our session, we do not want to impose our lens or vision, but we want to bring in different perspectives in a dialogical manner.

Too often, in academia, we exist as individual agents in the hamster wheel of a system that traps us into production. We must publish or perish on our own. How can we move from competition to synergistic collaboration where we form spaces of care for each other? (Lim & Frow, under review). The system needs to be transformed.

In February 2025, the US government cut funding for research that highlights diversity, equity, and inclusion. How can we resist and respond to these changes? How can we as a collective body be the resistance to guarantee that values like equality, inclusion, democracy, and participation continue to be practiced and taught? “Academia and activism should co-exist. Academic freedom provides us with a space to stand in the wings of discrimination in a way that’s not available to other people” (Blackstock qtd. in Rynor, 2023).

Finally, how can we as the academy find the “good life” and become a place of flourishing for both students and faculty? This will need imagination and innovation. Fleming (2024) asks us to return to the sociological imagination as survival will only be possible through social transformation. For those marginalized in the academic system, “daily academic practices become entrypoint to challenge and contest the dominant cultural template, recontextualizing systemic change in its organic form, just as gardening implies—finding and cultivating the plot and turning it to “a site of resistance and world-building” (Benjamin, 2024, p. 285). Guerrilla Gardening takes unused or neglected private spaces in an attempt to beautify them, while often incorporating fresh produce sources to those in need (Gardenstead, n.d.). Guerrilla gardeners are active participants in their living environment. They do not merely react . . . (Tracey, 2007, p. 32). We invite the TEAE

community to join this guerilla gardening effort so that we can flourish as we cultivate collaboration and community in the workplace and beyond.

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Self-knowledge as a term of identity: aspects of Platonic Philosophy in the constitution of work and personal identity

Konstantinos Mantzanaris

Abstract

The question posed in this study concerns the way in which we can free ourselves from the shackles of our identity by giving a new meaning to the way we know ourselves. Towards this end, the distinction between personal and professional experience contributes to leading to self-knowledge. That is, a perspective which creates the conditions for the respective transformations of the self at critical moments in our lives. However, the process of self-knowledge is far from any kind of definitive conditions, since it is subject to an existential quest that passes through those experiences that give meaning to existence.

So, the way we free ourselves from what makes us subject to a self-serving attachment to professional institutionalization also changes the way we see our history in social life. And it is at this crucial point that the subject's anxious attempt to emancipate himself from illusions of the images of the Platonic cave is found, precisely at the moment when someone emerges from his inertia and bliss in order to approach the truth of himself (Plato, 1967-8). In other words, a person raises crucial questions about his prior state in order to overturn it and cause the internal schism or what Mezirow refers to as a disorienting dilemma (2000). However, self-knowledge in the Platonic version is approached as the love for the soul in order for man to move towards virtue, i.e. towards the realization of the good or in other words the meaning of his life (Plato, 1967-8).

But how does Platonic self-knowledge allow us to read the modern way of life, in which professional specialization is often taken as our generalized identity? In what way, then, are we not to be our work? This is precisely where Plato leads us to paths that go beyond static considerations of identity, since he suggests the distinction between our professional role and the way we live in general. As he notes: «Ψυχὴν ἄρα ἡμᾶς κελεύει γνωρίσαι ὁ ἐπιτάττων γινῶναι ἑαυτόν» (Plato, 1967-68, 131a). Plato therefore urges us to know ourselves beyond our reference to professional specialization in order to be able to contribute to the general well-being and unity of the society as a whole.

Therefore, the virtue of the person enables us to face the existential crises in each case in the light of the true image of the self, i.e. in the light of an inner unity. And this unity has reference to the city because virtue only makes sense if it is integrated into a political planning. Inwardness, that is, the expression of the style of our personality, is judged on the basis of our participation in the processes of transformation of the city. Consequently, we are close to what Freire would define as critical consciousness, that is, a disenchantment of the city from its established values (2005), in order to experience an ethical knowledge of the self as a factor of internal unity. And this unity promotes existential meaning, i.e. what Plato defined as self-knowledge.

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Observation of works of art: A process of raising the question: Am I my job?

Georgia Mega

Abstract

This paper comments on the potential contribution of art to the awareness of the "work life-balance" issue. Briefly, a set of works of art is selected, which, if they observed in a targeted way, lead us to question the issues addressed by this particular Conference under the title of "Transforming Work-Life Balances". More specifically, through the observation of works of art proposed in this paper, the following questions are approached thoughtfully:

- How do we navigate our work-life balance?
- What does the way we hold work, and the way we hold life tell us about ourselves?
- What subjective value do we place on our jobs?
- Is my job my identity?
- What constitutes our deeper sense of purpose?

The approach of works of art is based on specific guiding questions aimed at the calm, careful and thorough observation of works of art, so that gradually the observer connects what he/she sees with his/hers emotional and experiential world.

The main goal of this approach is to observe-at first place- the issues we are studying in someone else's "life experience" – in this case the artwork – and then to relate it to our personal empirical world. In this way, the observer recognizes and becomes more aware of his/hers own attitude towards the issues we are studying. This realization makes him/her pause time for a while and ask himself/herself, "Am I my job? Why is this happening?"

The targeted observation of works of art takes place in an educational context theoretically supported not only by the Transformation Theory of Jack Mezirow (1991), but also by the pedagogical views of P. Freire (1970). More specifically, I believe that any transformation of a deep-rooted point of view requires a slow, careful and analytical process of approaching it. The observation of art has the characteristics of such a process that allows us to revisit our own lives with a broader, more open-minded conceptual way. (Greene, 2000).

The proposal presents specific works of art accompanied by specific guiding questions that challenge the observer to deal with them. Among them are visual works of art by Laurence Stephen Lowry (1887–1976), Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Liebermann Max (1847–1935), Stamatis Mitsios (STMTS), director George Zois and especially the short film: Casus Belli. Also the installation of the activist and artist Ai Weiwei is commented.

The theoretical foundation of the questions that challenge reflective thinking draws from a wide theoretical spectrum (Broudy, 1972 · Charon, 2010 · Greene, 2000 · Feldman, 1994 · Kokkos, 2010 · Perkins, 1994 · Mega, 2016). The process of observing artworks is proposed to take place in an educational context where special learning conditions promote reflective dialogue, trust and mutual respect (Mezirow, 1990).

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An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of the Challenges of Conducting Inclusive Academic Research.

Alessandra Romano & Yoshie Tomozumi Nakamura

Abstract

This contribution examines the challenges of conducting inclusive academic research through an intersectional feminist lens (Romano & Torres, 2024).

Intersectionality theory, as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), highlights how social categories such as gender, race, class, and sexuality are interconnected, creating unique experiences of oppression and marginalisation. Building on this framework, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) further explored how these intersecting systems of power operate within academic research, often perpetuating exclusionary practices. This is particularly evident in the struggle for work-life balance in academia, where the pressure to "publish or perish" and the conflation of identity with professional roles can create an environment that is both demanding and isolating. The inquiry posed by the Call for Proposal is addressed by the paper through an exploration of how feminist researchers can address these challenges by centring marginalised voices, challenging dominant narratives, and adopting more equitable and participatory research practices.

In accordance with the inquiry questions stipulated within the Call for Proposal, the paper explores how feminist researchers can address the aforementioned challenges by centring marginalised voices, challenging dominant narratives, and adopting more equitable and participatory research practices. Empirical evidence from the ALL Inclusive research project, a two-year study conducted with groups of young adult males and females diagnosed with autism (ASD), intellectual disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders, will be presented to support this argument. The overarching objective of the ALL Inclusive initiative was to develop training programs aimed at facilitating the inclusion of ASD and neurodivergent individuals into the workforce and fostering the development of their professional identities. The research team comprised individuals with non-binary gender identity, diagnosed neurodiversity and non-Western ethnic background. This heterogeneity was the primary criterion to ensure that a plurality of intersecting dimensions of diversity are represented in the research team and awareness of the privileged position of the researchers with respect to participants.

Notwithstanding the preceding efforts, the paper will emphasise the methodological and epistemological dilemmas inherent to conducting intersectional transformative research in academic settings. It will propose a methodological framework to facilitate the implementation of more equitable intersectional research practices.

Finally, the paper will explore the blurring lines between work and life in academia, where the "always-on" culture and the pressure to produce impactful research can make it difficult to disconnect and maintain a sustainable work-life balance. By adopting an intersectional feminist framework, researchers can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable research environment that values well-being alongside productivity and promotes a more collectively responsible academic complicity. The present contribution is provocative in nature and seeks to challenge the conventional "*I-positioning*" of researchers in

inclusive and participatory research as non-innocent concepts (Rautio et al., 2022). It calls for a radical re-evaluation of our understanding as researchers of “for whom” and “by whom” inclusive transformative research is conducted.

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Development and Professional Responsibility in Academic Retirement

Ellen Scully-Russ

Abstract

This proposal invites inquiry into how senior scholars like myself reorganize our research and professional lives in retirement and continue contributing to our community. A generational shift occurring in many professions and this shift is evident in the professorate as universities, responding to neo-liberal and populist pressures, diminish the numbers (and power) of senior, tenured faculty with early retirement schemas (Miron, 2022) and through strategies to delegitimize research on the questions of social inclusion and equity central to the adult education field (Ginsburg, 2022). While these trends trigger difficult identity transitions for many senior scholars, they also raise concerns about the nature and responsibility of the professorate in the post-truth era. I propose contributing my research on the changing nature of work, worker learning in transition, and my commitment to nurturing the future generation of scholars to an inquiry on how senior scholars learn and develop as they transform their work-life balance in retirement and how their identity work can be leveraged to foster a new intergenerational community to respond to the existential crisis in the academy today.

(re)Balancing work-life constructions in academic retirement

The call noted the academic profession's deep identity claims on its incumbents, and it asks rhetorically: *Does work ever truly end*, referring to the lack of boundaries between work and life for scholars? However, for some retiring academics, the answer is yes – leaving them to ask, *Who am I?* As education scholars, we have many theoretical frameworks to understand retiring individuals' developmental challenges. Throughout our careers, we have approached Mezirow's disorienting dilemma, Alhiet's processes of suffering and disruption of life-constructions, and Kegan's and Tobert's developmental polarities as an empirical question or with pedagogical curiosity, but rarely do we encounter and study these phenomena in our work and life. What support can we offer our elders in these transitions, and how can their experience give rise to new ways of thinking about adult life and development?

Retirement and professional responsibility for the future of the professorate in Adult Education

These questions are aligned with Erickson's seventh stage, generativity vs stagnation, when elders grapple with the tension between contributing to society and future generations and feeling stagnated and self-absorbed (Slater, 2003). Emanating from this theory is the notion of mentoring that suggests elders socialize the next generation by modeling the behaviors and values that uphold the historic practices of a profession. Likewise, Lave and Wenger's (2001) communities of practice posit that a practice is continued as those on the periphery, typically a new generation, move to the center as they learn the responsibility for continuing the institutions of the profession. However, what if the institution that upholds academic practices is broken? In that case, we may ask: What is the elders' responsibility to the next generation, and what is the continuing discipline that connects us? How do new lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004) of later-in-life academics disrupt, transform, or de-territorialize the assemblages of the academy and what new possibilities for nurturing the next generation emerge?

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Who am I?

Charru Sharma

Experiential Session

When I was in middle school, while sitting in the school bus, I often questioned myself or God, my higher self, whatever you may call - Why am I born? My questioning would go deeper as I would talk to myself, now I am in school, I will complete school and go to college, find a job, get married, have children, become old and die. This did not make any sense to me and it would come as a spiral leaving a vacuum within me. I delved with these questions and strived to find answers to them, but could not talk about it to anyone. Coming from Indian tradition and values, very early on in life I was fortunate to be in the company of spiritual masters. In my teens, I witnessed the experience of loss of my grand father, which accentuated my inner search about the meaning of life. Having gone much further, now being a Professor for nearly 30 years and also evolving continuously as a seeker, my questions have come to rest. For I have experienced that life is not about the labels we wear- as Professor, a Pilot, an entrepreneur, etc, or even the degrees that we have achieved- Ph.D's, Masters', etc, the properties we own, the car we drive and so forth. We are here on this planet as consciousness, all connected, all serving, each one unique and gifted in some way. My workshop will revolve around the critical questioning of Who am I?

I was apart from teaching also in the administrative role as the Principal of my college for two years, where a lot of innovations happened, initiatives started and gave exposure to students for their spiritual and academic growth. In my class, I introduce to freshers that they cultivate the habit of doing one good things every day, bring a smile on the face of a stranger, write about things they are grateful for at the end of each day. I also convey that the most significant lesson that they will learn from my class is to be a good human being and everything else is secondary to that. I often say no matter what you become, how much you earn, but if you are not a good human, all your achievements have no meaning. Some get it and that is enough for me. I stir their mind and heart and even if one student awakens, I think my job is well done.

I had a never ending "to-do"list as an administrator and I would strive hard to get it done on daily basis. My own experiences taught me a lot. Now I have things to do, but I don't push myself so hard. I can get anxious but not over board, as now I am learning to live my life, to enjoy looking at the moon, I allow myself to feel the cool breeze, to enjoy the beauty of nature encompassing me at all times.

The split I used to see in the world outside and my world within, I realized is not a split anymore. The external world is a myth and is a reflection of my inner world. If I am at peace within, my outer world will also reflect peace. That is the self transformation I have experienced.

Body/age reflections

Dagmar Spain

Experiential Session

Using embodiment in intergenerational community projects opens opportunities for intrapersonal and interpersonal development. The body at different life stages can be defined through physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects. In intergenerational community projects, all of these aspects can be addressed and shared by searching for an equilibrium with each other. Intergenerational community projects ask for nonjudgemental environments in which everyone becomes an expert in "embodied" communication, no matter what their skill level. The transformative components of these experiences are mutually generated, and transformation becomes a communal phenomenon yet personally grounded. In observation of this phenomenon, the aspects of inclusiveness to a variety of ages, skills, and positionally levels contribute to effective, transformative learning environments reflected by the testimonies of community members, ages 14 - 74, who have been part of past communal projects.

The main focus is each participant's body at different stages of life, without one being more "important" or "experienced" than the other. Based on past intergenerational community projects, these guiding questions introduce the experiential session:

1. What is my relationship to my body?
2. How do I view my body? How do I perceive others view of my body?
3. What do I expect from my body? What do others expect from my body?

Work/Life balances can be a matter of expectancies of what my body (in all its aspects) is supposed to do and produce, and co-relates to how much I allow my body to rest and retreat at my present life stage. Is productivity part of the fear of invisibility? In embodied sharing of personal movement sequences, expressing those concerns brings many learning perspectives into mutual spaces. This dialogic setting helps to 1. To learn and see the value of an embodied dialogue with oneself and others, 2. To articulate and possibly change one's perspectives on the body and age 3. To build communities on democratic and inclusive principles.

The subject of age and aging became very personal when my mother who has passed away most recently after being bedridden for 2.5 years. She has been a sports teacher, hiker, swimmer, and dancer. Once she was confined to bed, I questioned my thinking about productivity, vitality, and contribution to society. Once the physical body declines, older people tend to feel useless and no longer included in societal activities. If they continue to be active, their primary contacts are people in their age group and family members. Their concerns and desires are viewed as "a relatively homogeneous group" (Formosa, 2011, p. 319). I became intrigued to create (dialogic) environments where different age populations learn from each other in embodied ways, feel included, and are equally responsible for holding the *moving* space together.

Theoretical framework

Mezirow's (1991) shift of meaning perspectives, Freire's (1970) emancipatory teaching and learning, and Formosa's (2011) critical educational gerontology guide my thoughts and structure in this embodied experiential session.

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The Role of Age in the Holistic Approach to Lifelong Learning for Elderly Adult Learners in Second Chance Schools

Theodorakopoulou Thomaitsa & Maria Kagiavi

Abstract

This paper explores the transformative process of older adult learners over 65 who attend Second Chance Schools. These educational institutions allow older adults to re-engage with education, acquire new skills, and foster personal growth. The research is based on case studies of adult learners above 65, focusing on the obstacles they encountered throughout their lives that ultimately led them to Second Chance Schools and the motivations that drove them to pursue education at this stage. The study reveals how attending Second Chance Schools enables seniors to challenge conventional views of aging, thus transforming their attitudes and potential for lifelong learning. Older learners often display higher intrinsic motivation, driven by personal development, whereas younger learners may pursue education for career advancement or credentials. This transformation involves cognitive and intellectual growth and emotional and social changes. Second Chance Schools help seniors build a sense of belonging, interact with peers, and regain self-confidence by providing a supportive environment. The re-engagement in education also leads to improved mental health, as many report a renewed sense of motivation, well-being, and social inclusion. Ultimately, the experience of attending Second Chance Schools acts as a catalyst for personal reinvention, overcoming age-related barriers, and offering seniors a fresh start. The study highlights the diverse motivations and obstacles faced by senior age groups and the case of transformation in older adult participants. This study examines the differentiation of the holistic approach to lifelong learning among elderly adult learners, utilizing a qualitative methodology through interviews. The findings indicate that age is crucial in the holistic approach and transformation of adults in Second Chance Schools.

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“So, what’s next?” Work-life stressors and the joy of “more”.

Jose Tirado

Abstract

By the time this proposal has been received, after more than eight years of work, I will have been awarded my doctorate in education by the University of Iceland. My research was an autoethnographical exploration of my personal journey of transformation through Buddhism, psychology, political activism, and finally, the field of education. I concluded that one of the educational fields I’d been involved with, Engaged Buddhism, has not only been the dominant one, but is now the next phase of my academic life – my post-doc research. That while each of my fields was educative by nature, my deeper motivations were Buddhist in nature. I remember coming home after the last hurdle: a glowing report from my examiners, and I sat exhausted in my office at home and then marveled at what I immediately thought of: “well, what’s next?”

But the context is key and here I am, a 65 year old man with adult children and young grandchildren who has labored in Iceland as a cook, service worker in Costco, and teacher, all while working on my doctorate and taking care of a family. Balancing work-life issues is not abstract for me. Using an autoethnographic approach, I will speak to this question of work life balance through excerpts from my dissertation, journals, and recent reflections to compile a report of what such a conflict entails.

With one heart attack already under my belt as a result of stress and overwork (at the age of 38), I have jokingly told my children that, despite not having had a second heart attack, I am sure I will not survive a third. Anticipating the deleterious effects of historically mismanaging my own work-life balance, and this, despite being a meditation teacher since 1997, is at this latter stage of my life, no longer a glib option. It is a necessity. While my own movement from academic field to academic field was never without a precipitating trauma such as the death of a parent, or an economic collapse, I frequently wondered, can we become *transformation junkies*, searching out new adventures in remaking oneself as a maladaptive strategy to trauma and a life of tumultuous happenstance? And is this maladaptation something that increases rather than decreases stress? What can we do about this? These are some of the questions I will consider in the hope that in documenting my own struggles, others might find some lessons to use in their own work-life conflicts.

Navigating multiple identities and responsibilities: mothers in higher education

Cynthia Trililani

Abstract

Adult education has significantly contributed to social change by encouraging individuals to reflect critically on their identities, beliefs, and values (Mezirow, 2018). Consequently, education enables individuals to understand themselves and the world around them while raising awareness of the structures of inequality and oppression present in society (Dirkx, 1998). As Fleming (2016) notes, this social change is driven by the aspiration for recognition of social justice and equality that “enhances the emancipatory agenda of transformation” (p. 22), where personal and social contexts are interlinked.

In recent decades, the number of women entering higher education in Iceland has increased, particularly among those with children. Iceland boasts the highest number of mature students, recorded in the report as having the oldest average age demographic within the student population (Hauschildt et al., 2024) and the most significant percentage of student parents at 33% compared to other European nations (Eurostudent VI, 2018). As the global leader in gender equality, women’s participation in higher education in Iceland is supported by its national policies promoting gender equality (Einarsdóttir, 2020) and the Nordic Cooperation Programme on gender equality aims to create equal opportunities for both men and women in the labour market and educational sectors (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). The Nordic welfare model demonstrates that education fosters gender equality, health, and well-being (Lundgren & Cuadrado, 2020).

However, behind the utopian notion of a gender equality paradise, studies conducted in Iceland on women and men in academia have consistently shown that women, in particular, face unique challenges in balancing multiple responsibilities due to gender norms compared to their male counterparts (Heijstra et al., 2016; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013; Smidt et al., 2017; Staub & Rafnsdóttir, 2020). This paper is based on my research concerning immigrant women from minority backgrounds in Icelandic higher education. My research is profoundly influenced by my identity and experiences as an immigrant woman of colour in a predominantly white nation, studying at a predominantly white educational institution. By adopting an intersectional perspective, I reflect on and incorporate my experiences and position as an immigrant woman, mature student, and researcher in higher education alongside those of the participants. Heidi Safia Mirza (2015), a distinguished feminist scholar, posits that embodied intersectionality aims to understand the struggles of “othered” women and their educational experiences. Given that our invisibility within the broader societal context shapes our lives in Iceland, I investigate how race, gender, class, and immigration status significantly affect our educational trajectories and how we navigate our multiple identities and responsibilities. More specifically, I explore the ways in which we leverage our education to instigate transformation in our lives and scrutinise the social hierarchical structures within which we are confined. By presenting narratives from minority women regarding their situated marginality, which compels an “educational urgency,” I offer insight into their perspective of “education as transformative” (Mirza, 2006, p. 144).

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Wellness as a path towards transforming work-life balance

Margueritte Welch & Stacey Robins

Experiential Session

Introduction

The TEAE call shines light on work-life balance. It invites us to question the distinction itself and notes how “the questions we pursue in our research often reflect our own life experiences” (Koulaouzidis et al., 2024). Our research considers personal and professional transition as a source of learning and transformation. To explore these experiences more deeply we created a space for reflection, self development and connection, while also producing the research expected by our academic institutions.

Our work

We focus on the concept of wellness in our lives, particularly during times of transition, in ways that evoke transformation. We take a dialogic, appreciative inquiry approach, building on what’s working now, with attention to possibilities and exploring deeper insights. Centering wellness as one explores work-life balance is essential for several reasons: maintaining a sense of equanimity in times of transition or turbulence, enhancing one’s well-being in multiple contexts, and the practice of attending to wellness may itself be transformative.

Theoretical Perspectives

Wellness and its absence have been well considered as a site of transformative learning (see for example Brendel, 2009; King, 2012; Hoggan, 2015). We define wellness using Goss et al.’s (2010) definition, an

active process through which the individual becomes aware of all aspects of the self and makes choices toward a more healthy existence through balance and integration across multiple life dimensions...aligned with their values and aspirations” (p. 5).

This definition highlights balance in personal, professional and community realms and invites integration across dimensions.

Our work on wellness, transition and transformation is framed by Kasl and Yorks’ (2002, 2012) holistic approach, “[an] *enduring change in how a person affectively experiences ... and appl[ies] new action in life contexts that ... require personal or social healing* [italics in original]. (Kasl & Yorks, 2012, p. 509). Holistic explorations of wellness across work and life invite consideration of multiple and potentially overlapping dimensions, as our work on wellness has provided for us as educators, researchers, friends and community members.

Session Method

Our experiential session participants will explore wellness in the context of work and life. We will engage in self-reflection, presentational knowing activities and dialogue with supportive peers modeled on the cooperative inquiry between the co-authors.

Participants will explore elements that support wellness found through our empirical research (i.e., Community, Voice, Vulnerability, Accountability, Radical acceptance, Care, Questions and

reframing). The intended outcome of the workshop is to deepen understanding of how attention to wellness can catalyze transformation of work-life balance.

Our workshop flow follows:

- Introduce topic
- Community building
- Create visual representation of wellness and transition
- Partner sharing
- Journaling
- Small group work
- Harvesting learning
- Closing

Conclusion

What matters in our lives informs our research, and is relevant on multiple levels: intrapersonally, interpersonally, organizationally and with respect to what's going on in our world. Integrating our knowledge of self across contexts facilitates meeting our needs both personally and professionally.

Note about the proposed session:

We would be open to doing the session in two parts. The first part, early in the retreat, would include creating the visual representation and partner sharing with journaling to deepen learning. We would then have participants identify actions to engage in during the retreat. The second part, later in the retreat, would include small group/partner work reflecting on the actions and harvesting the learning from the small groups.

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